

VZCZCXYZ0002
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNT #0807/01 1931322
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 111322Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9986
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 4156
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0369
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4772
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0634
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0243
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0653
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4360
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2652
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0673
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1309
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1928
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1327
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2622
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC 0068
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC 0218

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000807

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA, DRL, AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: KAGAN EXPLOSIONS: DAY TWO

REF: A. TASHKENT 794
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 802

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Later in the day and evening of July 10, the state-controlled media carried several stories on the series of explosions which occurred early that morning at an army depot in the town of Kagan, near Bukhara (reftels), reporting "preliminary data" as showing that 3 individuals were killed and 21 were injured. In contrast, independent websites reported that Bukhara's hospitals were full of the injured and that the number of casualties was probably much higher than reported by the government. On July 11, our most reliable contact in Bukhara provided us an update of the situation, reporting that while Kagan is still cordoned off by a large number of military personnel, some residents have been able to return to certain regions of the town by foot. The source also reported that approximately 250 were killed and 3,000 injured, and that approximately 12,000 to 15,000 individuals have been evacuated from Kagan. According to the contact, the government has not yet provided adequate food and lodging to the evacuees. The source also reported that while rumors continued to spread about possible further explosions, the situation in Bukhara appears to have calmed down somewhat. In addition, the Foreign Minister called the Ambassador today to inform him that President Karimov appreciated the Ambassador's offer of assistance yesterday, but that such assistance was unnecessary. Clearly, we are hearing different stories about the situation in Kagan and Bukhara from official and unofficial sources, and it is still not possible for us to confirm information from either side. We remain concerned by reports that evacuees have not been provided with adequate medical care, food, and lodging. There have been no reports of AmCit casualties. End summary.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER: OFFICIAL UZBEK MEDIA REACTION

[1](#)2. (U) On July 10, the state-controlled media carried several stories on the explosions which occurred early that morning in Kagan. Most of the stories reported that

according to "preliminary data," 3 individuals were killed and 21 injured by the explosions. The website of the Uzbekistan National News Agency (UzA) reported that "an ignition occurred at the rocket and artillery depot of the Defense Ministry's military unit in Kagan district of Bukhara region, resulting in fire and explosion of the ammunition at the depot." It also reported that "regional Interior Affairs Department and the Defense Ministry troops cordoned the area of the accident...the civilians living nearby were evacuated."

13. (U) The UzA website further reported that a government commission has been set up to "neutralize the situation, conduct the necessary security measures, and provide assistance to the victims." It also reported that the commission has begun to investigate the accident. The commission will reportedly include "heads of the Government"; the National Security Service; the General Prosecutor's Office; the Ministries of Defense, Emergency Situations, and Internal Affairs; and "other structures."

14. (SBU) In the evening of July 10, the state-controlled Uzbek Television First Channel reported (incredibly) that "life in (Kagan) is normal...central and administrative buildings, hospitals and public organizations in Kagan district and in the town are working as usual." The program went on to blame "certain foreign media" for spreading "false information causing a sensation." The program interviewed Interior Minister Bahodir Matlubov, who was in Kagan and reported that "in line with our president's resolution, a government commission led by the Uzbek prime minister was set up immediately...special groups from the relevant ministries arrived at the scene...people were evacuated from potentially dangerous places...provided with food and medicines, as well as with a temporary residence." Matlubov was further quoted as saying that "...the fire was put out by the morning of 10 July...repair work and work to put everything in order at the scene of the incident is still under way."

INDEPENDENT MEDIA TELLS A MUCH DIFFERENT STORY

15. (U) On July 10, the independent Ferghana.ru website reported a much different story. In a purported interview, an unnamed "witness" in Bukhara reported that the "Bukhara regional clinical hospital and medical emergency centers are full with injured from Kagan...cardiology and oncological hospitals are being temporarily freed of their own patients to take people coming from Kagan." The witness was not able to estimate the number of deaths, but believed they were much higher than reported in the official state media. The eyewitness reported hearing from Kagan residents that a five-story building and a hospital close to the military depot were destroyed in the blasts. The eyewitness further reported that most of the injured arriving at hospitals in Bukhara lived two to three kilometers away from the depot. In a separate article, Ferghana reported that residents have been advised to stay home and "not talk to strangers," and that telephone communications have also been cut off.

REPORT FROM RELIABLE CONTACT IN BUKHARA

16. (C) On July 11, Bukhara-based human rights activist Shukhrat Ganiev provided us an update of the situation in Bukhara and Kagan. Ganiev reported that approximately 100 to 125 firefighters were on the scene trying to put out fires. He reported that a large number of military personnel from bases in Bukhara, Jizzakh, and Tashkent provinces have been transported to Kagan and were helping to block off the city. He reported that residents of Kagan could not reenter the city by car, but individuals were able to return to certain regions by foot, while other areas of the town near the army depot remain blocked off. Contrary to certain reports, he noted that the Kagan train station (the main train station for Bukhara) was not destroyed. Ganiev said that the army depot held artillery shells and aerial bombs ("aviabomba"). He reported that the depot held 30 to 50 "echelons" of munitions (Comment: A local Embassy employee explained that

an echelon was equal to 16 train wagons full of munitions. He believed that 30 to 50 echelons was most likely an exaggeration. End comment.)

¶17. (C) Ganiev reported that the dead and injured are being brought to a make-shift hospital and morgue at a college building in the town of Qizil Tepe, about 20 kilometers from Kagan and Bukhara. The government has reportedly sent approximately 35 doctors from Tashkent to help with the wounded. According to Ganiev, the government was seeking to avoid sending the dead and wounded to Bukhara in order to avoid information from leaking out. He reported an unofficial death toll so far of 235, with about 3,000 individuals injured (Comment: We are unable to verify Ganiev's figures, but we certainly think the government's own figures are too low. The RSO spoke with police contacts in Tashkent on July 10, who reported hearing from colleagues in Bukhara an unofficial death toll of about 60 individuals.) According to Ganiev, many of those killed were at the Kagan City Hospital, which was approximately 1.5 kilometers from the epicenter. In comparison, the center of Kagan was 2.1 kilometers from the depot, while the center of Bukhara was about 14.5 kilometers away. According to Ganiev, the explosions also reportedly caused damage to the Karaul Bazaar prison in Kagan, and authorities were in the process of trying to transport approximately 1,550 prisoners to prison number 64-03 in Bukhara city.

¶18. (C) Ganiev further reported hearing from contacts in the local Bukhara Department of Emergency Services that approximately 12,000 - 15,000 individuals were evacuated from Kagan, including about 2,500 to 3,000 elderly individuals and children. He said that the evacuees were being placed in lyceums and colleges in Bukhara and Qizil Tepe. He also reported that authorities were loading evacuees on buses and sending them further afield. Ganiev said that many of the evacuees did not have any time to gather belongings from their homes and were not being provided with adequate lodging, food, and water. He also noted that many Kagan residents were separated from their relatives during the hasty evacuation. Noting that authorities have done little to help relatives find one another, Ganiev said that he was in the process of organizing volunteers to man a makeshift informational center for Kagan evacuees. Another contact in Bukhara on July 11 appeared to confirm what Ganiev told us on July 10: residents were not being evacuated from Bukhara, except for a region of the city adjacent to Kagan. Evacuees from Kagan were seen gathered in Bukhara's parks and squares.

¶19. (C) Ganiev observed that rumors were still spreading in Bukhara of possible additional explosions in Kagan. One rumor held that individuals needed to be at least 40 kilometers from Bukhara to be safe. As a result, he reported that many residents have left Bukhara in their cars and were staying with relatives in villages and rural areas. Nevertheless, he reported that the city operated as normal, and that the bazaars and stores were open. In comparison to the evening of July 10, when many residents appeared to be in a state of near panic, he noted that the atmosphere in Bukhara had appeared to calm down.

¶10. (C) Comment: Ganiev is one of our most reliable contacts in the Bukhara area. Unlike some other human rights contacts, his information tends to be fairly even-handed and not sensationalist. He is also known to have well-developed contacts among law-enforcement, medical, and legal establishments and the local regional administration in Bukhara. No doubt he is drawing upon these contacts for much of this information. End comment.

KARIMOV POLITELY DECLINES OFFER OF ASSISTANCE

¶11. (C) On the morning of July 11, Foreign Minister Norov telephoned the Ambassador to say that his offer to explore Explosive Ordinance Disposal and medical assistance from the United States had been conveyed to President Karimov. Norov said Karimov asked that the message be conveyed back that the

offer was appreciated but that the government has the situation under control. Norov further reported that a commission chaired by Prime Minister Mirziyayev has been formed and that all appropriate measures are being taken to address the aftermath of the disaster. Norov stuck with official estimates of 3 dead and 21 injured.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) We are hearing different stories about the situation in Kagan and Bukhara from official and unofficial sources, and it is still not possible for us to confirm information from either side. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle, but it is clear that the government's current death toll is too low. While it does appear that the government has managed to get a handle on the situation to a certain degree, we are still concerned by reports that evacuees have not been provided with adequate medical care, food, and lodging. There have been no reports of AmCit casualties. We will continue to follow the situation closely and provide updates as needed.

NORLAND